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‘Compelling . . . an important book’ *Irish News*

PENGUIN CANADA

THE DEFENCE OF THE REALM

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW is Professor of Modern and Contemporary History and former Chair of the Faculty of History at Cambridge University. He is also Chair of the British Intelligence Study Group, founding Co-Editor of *Intelligence and National Security*, former Visiting Professor at Harvard, Toronto and the Australian National University, and a regular presenter of BBC Radio and TV documentaries. His fifteen previous books include *The Mitrokhin Archive* volumes 1 and 2, and a number of path-breaking studies on the use and abuse of secret intelligence in modern history.



MI5's self-image at the end of 1917 on a Christmas/New Year card designed by its deputy head, Eric Holt-Wilson, and drawn by the leading illustrator, Byam Shaw. MI5, in the guise of a masked Britannia, impales the loathsome figure of Subversion with her monogrammed trident before he can stab the British fighting man in the back and prevent him achieving 'Mankind's Immortal Victory' – MIV (MI5 in pseudo-roman form).

(*opposite*) The Security Service's all-seeing eye with a slightly unorthodox interwar Latin motto intended to mean 'Security is the reward of unceasing vigilance.'

CHRISTOPHER ANDREW

The Defence of the Realm

The Authorized History of MI5



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Foreword by the Director General of the Security Service

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to write a foreword for Christopher Andrew's authorized history of the Security Service. Stephen Lander, Director General of the Service between 1996 and 2002, recognized that a history of the Security Service would be an appropriate way to mark our centenary in 2009 and he began the project of which this book is the outcome. Both his successor, Eliza Manningham-Buller, and I have been closely involved in its development. We decided very early on that, to generate the public understanding and support that is vital to the Service's continued success, we needed to commission an 'open' history for publication rather than a 'closed' one for internal consumption. It was also important for the book to be written by an independent historian, who could make objective judgements on the successes and failures of the Service in its first hundred years. We have been fortunate in having, in Professor Christopher Andrew, an author with an exceptional understanding of the intelligence world, a great capacity to research and identify key material from the very large volumes available in our files and the confidence to draw his own conclusions. I would like to thank him for the professionalism and dedication he has shown throughout the project.

The Security Service is, of course, an organization much of whose work must remain secret. This is to protect those who share information with us and ensure that they and others will have the confidence to do so in the future, and to prevent those who seek to harm this country and its people from gaining information which might help them carry out their plans. Writing a history for publication which covers the work of the Service up to the present day is, therefore, a considerable challenge and one which I do not believe that any other major intelligence or security service anywhere in the world has attempted. But for me, and for the previous DGs who have been involved in this project, it is a challenge worth attempting. The Security Service of 2009 is a much more open organization than that of 1909 or even 1980, when I first applied to join. This reflects the expectations of society at large that public institutions should be properly accountable. It also reflects the changing nature of the threats we face. For much of the first eighty years of its existence, the Security Service was concerned with various forms of foreign state espionage. This was, and remains, a vital area of our work, but in the last twenty years terrorism has become the most significant threat with which we deal. The direct impact of terrorism on the life of the average resident of the UK is much greater than that of espionage or some of the other threats with which the Service has dealt. It is therefore important that we as a Service are as open and transparent as possible, within the constraints of what the law allows, because that openness, by supporting public confidence in us, helps us do our job of protecting national security. In the last twenty years we have begun publicly to acknowledge the identity of the Director General of the Service; we have moved to a

system of recruitment of staff through open advertising; we have established a public website; and we have instituted a programme of releasing some of our older records to The National Archives. These and other developments are a reflection of a commitment to being as open as we can about what we do, of which this History is the most recent and in many ways the most ambitious demonstration.

Striking the balance in the text between openness and the protection of national security has been a complex and demanding exercise requiring many hours of detailed discussion between Professor Andrew and members of the Service, and an extensive clearance process involving other departments and agencies. The History as published includes some information that is embarrassing or uncomfortable to the Service. Information has only been omitted if its disclosure would damage national security or, in a small number of cases, if its publication would be inappropriate for wider public interest reasons. Inevitably, more material damaging to national security has been omitted from the more modern parts of the book. Given the sensitivity of the judgements concerning omissions on national security grounds, the principles which have governed our approach to the text are given in some detail on the Service's website at www.MI5.gov.uk/output/centenary-history-policy-on-disclosure.html. In particular, we have ensured that everything included in the text is both consistent with the Government's policy on 'Neither Confirm nor Deny' (NCND) and at the same time necessary to meet our aims in publishing Professor Andrew's work. The consequence of this clearance process is that there is nothing in the book which could prejudice national security.

The judgements and conclusions drawn by Professor Andrew in the History are his own, not those of the Security Service or the Government as a whole. Giving Professor Andrew the independence to reach his own conclusions, however well or badly they reflected on the Service, was a key element of the project. In writing the History, Professor Andrew has drawn not only on Security Service records but also on a host of other material available to him. It should not, therefore, be assumed that his conclusions are based solely on material in our records which is unavailable to the public. This book is not an 'official' history within the terms of the Government programme of research and publication of Official Histories on a variety of subjects relating to government activity.

I hope that you will enjoy the History and that you will consider as I do that it provides a striking new insight into an important element in our national life over the last century and into the work of the many dedicated members of the Service whose contribution has been, and to a large degree will remain, unsung.

Jonathan Evans



'This is my first visit to MI5.'
Michael Heath's depiction (after Escher) of the mysterious public image of MI5 in the later years of the Cold War (*Spectator*, 29 November 1986).

Preface

For most of its history the Security Service (MI5) has seemed to outsiders a deeply mysterious organization. Successive governments intended it to be so. The Service, like the rest of the intelligence community, was to stay as far from public view as possible. The historian Sir Michael Howard declared in 1985: ‘So far as official government policy is concerned, the British security and intelligence services do not exist. Enemy agents are found under gooseberry bushes and intelligence is brought by the storks.’ The past as well as present of the Security Service remained officially taboo. Even at the end of the Cold War, staff could scarcely have imagined that the Service would mark its hundredth birthday in 2009 by publishing this Centenary History.

The first century of the Security Service falls into six distinct periods (identified in the Contents) which reflect its changing priorities. For eighty years, the Service set out to ‘defend the realm’ against, alternately, Germany and Russia – and their supporters inside the United Kingdom. Before and during the two world wars, MI5’s chief priority was to counter German intelligence operations. For most of the interwar years and the whole of the Cold War, by contrast, the Service’s main concerns were what it saw as the linked threats of Soviet espionage and Communist subversion. Though MI5 comprehensively defeated the British operations of both Kaiser Wilhelm II’s and Adolf Hitler’s intelligence services, it found Soviet intelligence a more difficult opponent. Not until the mass expulsion of KGB and GRU (military intelligence) personnel from London in 1971 did the Security Service gain the upper hand.

MI5’s deputy head proudly declared on its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1934: ‘Our Security Service is more than national; it is Imperial.’ During the quarter-century after the Second World War, its officers and many other staff could expect to spend a quarter to a third of their careers in the Empire and Commonwealth. The Service’s overseas role adds another dimension to our understanding of British decolonization. Until the beginning of the ‘Troubles’ in 1969, the Service knew far less about Northern Ireland than about Anglophone Africa. It also had little experience of counter-terrorism. As late as 1974 only 7½ per cent of the Service’s resources were devoted to counter-terrorist operations against both the IRA and international terrorist groups, whose emergence as a security threat nearly coincided with the start of the Troubles. Until 1992 the lead intelligence role in Britain against the IRA belonged not to the Service but to the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union transformed Security Service priorities. For the first time in its history the Service became primarily a counter-terrorist agency. Since then it has faced two serious terrorist offensives: from the IRA, which posed a more dangerous threat to mainland Britain for much of the 1990s than ever before, and from Islamist terrorists, who during the

first decade of the twenty-first century emerged as an even greater threat. In 2007 thirty 'active' terrorist plots were being investigated, more than at any previous point in British history.

The transformation of Security Service priorities was accompanied by a dramatic change in its public image. The Service began to realize in the closing years of the Cold War that, as British society became more open and less deferential, levels of secrecy which went beyond its operational needs damaged public confidence and bred conspiracy theories. For the first time, the recent history of the Security Service had become front-page news. The episodes which received most publicity, however, were entirely fictitious as well as damaging to its public reputation: the non-existent career of Sir Roger Hollis (Director General from 1956 to 1965) as a Soviet agent and the Service's equally non-existent conspiracy to overthrow the Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson.

In 1989 the Security Service Act placed the Service on a statutory footing for the first time in its history. Three years later, Stella Rimington became both the first DG whose appointment was publicly announced and the first female British intelligence chief. Rimington believed that one of the achievements of her term as DG was 'the demystification of the Service and the creation of a more informed public and media perception'. Demystification was encouraged by the establishment in 1994 of an oversight committee of parliamentarians, the Intelligence and Security Committee, which produced annual published reports on the intelligence agencies. Some of the simplistic headlines which had greeted Rimington's appointment in 1992 (among them 'MOTHER OF TWO GETS TOUGH WITH TERRORISTS') were no longer imaginable by the time she retired in 1996. A year later the Service began advertising publicly for new recruits.

There remain strict limits to 'the demystification of the Service'. Its commitment to preserving the secrecy of current operations, as well as to concealing the identities of staff and agents, has changed little over the past century. By contrast, the Service has become much less secretive about its past record. Since 1997 it has released to the National Archives over 4,000 files on its first half-century, which have given rise to a growing volume of innovative historical research.

In 2002 the Service advertised for a part-time official historian to write its Centenary History and interviewed a series of applicants. I was fortunate to be selected and began work at its Thames House headquarters in 2003. Since then I have been given virtually unrestricted access to the Service's twentieth-century files as well as to the more limited number of twentyfirst-century records I have asked to see. No other of the world's leading intelligence agencies has given similar access to a historian appointed from outside. A significant minority of the files I have seen contain material on intelligence sources and methods which it was clear from the outset could not be published. I thought it important, however, to read these files in order to try to ensure that conclusions in *The Defence of the Realm* based on documents which can be quoted are not contradicted by files whose contents remain classified. Like previous official historians in Britain, I was given an assurance at the outset (which has been fully honoured) that no attempt would be made to change any of the judgements I arrived at.

Clearance of this volume has, unsurprisingly, been a protracted process. There is an

inevitable tension between the needs of national security and the wishes of historians. My advocacy of the case for clearance on matters which I judge important has, as colleagues in the Security Service can confirm, not lacked vigour. The issues involved are sometimes difficult. There is much, mostly classified, evidence to support the view of the Security Service that retaining the confidence of current agents makes it necessary to conceal the identities of most of their predecessors as well as their own. The Service has, however, broken important new ground by making it possible for me to bring this history up to the present.

The most difficult part of the clearance process has concerned the requirements of other government departments. One significant excision as a result of these requirements in Chapter E4 is, I believe, hard to justify. This and other issues relating to the level of secrecy about past intelligence operations required by the current needs of national security would, in my view, merit consideration by the Intelligence and Security Committee (though that, of course, is a matter for the Committee to decide).